Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-28 are canceled.

29. (Previously Presented) A hammermill comprising:

a housing having an inlet end, a discharge end, a sidewall extending between the inlet end and the discharge end, and a longitudinal axis, the sidewall of the housing defining an enclosed work space, an inlet opening being defined in the sidewall of the housing proximate the inlet end of the housing, a discharge opening being defined in the sidewall of the housing proximate the discharge end of the housing, the inlet opening being disposed above the longitudinal axis of the housing and the discharge opening being disposed below the longitudinal axis of the housing;

a rotor assembly disposed within the housing for rotation about the longitudinal axis of the housing;

a plurality of opposing pairs of disks mounted to and circumscribing the rotor assembly, each pair of disks being spaced apart a predetermined distance;

a first plurality of hammers coupled to the rotor assembly and disposed in the enclosed work space, wherein at least one hammer of the first plurality of hammers is positioned between respective pairs of disks;

a second plurality of hammers coupled to the rotor assembly, the second plurality of hammers disposed proximate the inlet end of the housing and adjacent to and upstream of the first plurality of hammers, wherein at least one hammer of the second plurality of hammers is positioned between respective pairs of disks; and

at least one annular ring having an peripheral ring edge, wherein each annular ring is connected to the rotor assembly between a portion of at least one hammer of the respective first and second plurality of hammers and at least one disk of the respective pair of disks, wherein

the longitudinal widths of the annular ring and the hammer substantially equal the predetermined distance between the pair of disks;

wherein each hammer of the first and second plurality of hammers has an outer tip which defines a hammer rotation radius about the longitudinal axis of the housing, wherein the peripheral ring edge of the annular ring extends outwardly from the rotor assembly toward the sidewall of the housing, wherein the peripheral ring edge defines a maximum radius of curvature about the longitudinal axis of the housing that is about or less than the hammer rotation radius, and wherein the diameter of each disk is less than the diameter of the annular ring.

30. (Original) The hammermill of Claim 29, wherein the annular ring is positioned upstream of the at least one hammer.

31. (Previously Presented) The hammermill of Claim 29, further comprising at least one annular spacer member, wherein each annular spacer member is connected to the rotor assembly between a portion of at least one hammer of the respective first and second plurality of hammers and at least one disk of the respective pair of disks, wherein the longitudinal widths of the annular spacer member and the hammer substantially equal the predetermined distance between the pair of disks, and wherein one annular spacer member or one annular ring is connected to the rotor assembly adjacent each hammer of the first and second plurality of hammers.

32. (Original) The hammermill of Claim 29, further comprising a third plurality of hammers coupled to the rotor assembly, the third plurality of hammers disposed proximate the discharge end of the housing and adjacent the first plurality of hammers.

33. (Previously Presented) The hammermill of Claim 32, wherein one annular ring of the at least one annular ring is connected to the rotor assembly between a disk of the plurality of pairs of disks and at least one hammer of the first, second, and third plurality of hammers.

34. (Original) The hammermill of Claim 33, wherein the annular ring is positioned upstream side of the at least one hammer.

35. (Previously Presented) The hammermill of Claim 33, further comprising at least one annular spacer member, wherein each annular spacer member is connected to the rotor assembly between a portion of at least one hammer of the respective first, second and third plurality of hammers and at least one disk of the respective pair of disks, wherein the longitudinal widths of the annular spacer member and the hammer substantially equal the predetermined distance between the pair of disks, and wherein one annular spacer member or one annular ring is connected to the rotor assembly adjacent each hammer of the first, second, and third plurality of hammers.

36. (Original) The hammermill of Claim 29, further comprising a first attrition plate assembly having a generally circular configuration secured to the sidewall within the enclosed work space of the housing, the first attrition plate assembly arranged such that at least a portion of each hammer of the first plurality of hammers is spaced from and overlies a portion of the first attrition plate assembly, wherein the first attrition plate assembly defines a substantially continuous first work surface in the enclosed work space.

37. (Original) The hammermill of Claim 36, further comprising a second attrition plate assembly having a generally semi-circular configuration and secured within the housing adjacent the first attrition plate assembly and the inlet opening of the housing, wherein at least a portion of each hammer of the second plurality of hammers is spaced from and overlies a portion of the second attrition plate assembly.

38. (Currently Amended) The hammermill of Claim [[32]] 37, further comprising a third attrition plate assembly having a generally semi-circular configuration and secured within the housing adjacent the discharge end of the housing and the first attrition plate assembly.

39. (Original) The hammermill of Claim 29, wherein at least a portion of the second plurality of hammers underlies the inlet opening.

40. (Original) The hammermill of Claim 32, further comprising a grate assembly disposed in the discharge end of the housing, wherein at least a portion of each hammer of the third plurality of hammers overlies a portion of the grate assembly.

41. (Original) The hammermill of Claim 40, wherein the grate assembly comprises a plurality of screen bars, each screen bar of the plurality of screen bars extending substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the housing.

42. (Original) The hammermill of Claim 41, wherein the plurality of screen bars are spaced apart a predetermined distance.

Claims 43 -55 are canceled.

56. (Previously Presented) A hammermill comprising:

a housing having an inlet end, a discharge end, a sidewall extending between the inlet end and the discharge end, a longitudinal axis, a primary reduction chamber and an adjoining secondary reduction chamber, the sidewall proximate the inlet end of the housing defining an inlet opening, wherein, in the secondary reduction chamber, the sidewall of the housing defining an enclosed work space, and wherein, in the primary reduction chamber, the sidewall and the inlet opening define a partially enclosed work space;

a rotor assembly disposed within the housing for rotation about the longitudinal axis of the housing;

a plurality of opposing pairs of disks mounted to and circumscribing the rotor assembly, each pair of disks being spaced apart a predetermined distance;

a plurality of hammers coupled to the rotor assembly and disposed in both the primary and secondary reduction chambers, respectively, wherein each hammer of the plurality of hammers has an outer tip which defines a hammer rotation radius about the longitudinal axis of the housing, each hammer being positioned therebetween a respective pair of the plurality of opposing pairs of disks, wherein each hammer of the plurality of hammers is selected from a group consisting of fixed hammers, swing hammers, or a combination thereof; and

an attrition plate assembly secured to the sidewall within the primary and secondary reduction chambers, respectively, the attrition plate assembly arranged such that the hammers are spaced from and overlie a portion of the attrition plate assembly;

at least one annular ring having an peripheral ring edge, wherein one annular ring of the at least one annular ring is connected to the rotor assembly between a portion of at least one hammer of the plurality of hammers and a disk of a pair of opposing disks such that the peripheral ring edge of the annular ring extends outwardly from the rotor assembly toward the sidewall of the housing, and wherein the peripheral ring edge defines a maximum radius of curvature about the longitudinal axis of the housing that is about or less than the hammer rotation radius.

57. (Original) The hammermill of Claim 56, wherein the annular ring is positioned upstream of the at least one hammer.

58. (Previously Presented) The hammermill of Claim 56, further comprising at least one annular spacer member, wherein each annular spacer member is connected to the rotor assembly between a portion of at least one hammer of the respective first and second plurality of hammers and at least one disk of the respective pair of disks, wherein the longitudinal widths of the annular spacer member and the hammer substantially equal the predetermined distance between the pair of disks, and wherein one annular spacer member or one annular ring is connected to the rotor assembly adjacent each hammer of the plurality of hammers.